

Communications handbook

User guide – Style

User guide – Templates

User guide – Branding



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This user guide should be used in conjunction with the *Communications handbook*, other user guides and templates

Note

References to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations should be taken as indicative of whichever federal government department is responsible for hosting NATESE and its key advisory councils, including FLAG.

Communications handbook and user guides

The *Communications handbook* and its associated user guides should be used to guide the delivery of communications activities endorsed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG). Their purpose is to ensure that Strategy outputs are delivered clearly, consistently and effectively in terms of content (ie key messages) and style. These documents are available from the Secretariat, and any updates will be communicated to internal and external users.

1. Writing

Consistent and high quality writing gives a positive and professional impression of the Strategy. This user guide details preferred writing, spelling, correct use of grammar and other editorial style issues that may arise as part of your everyday work.

1.1 Communicating your message

The best way to get your message across is to write clearly, simply and in plain English. You should assume your audience has only a very basic level of understanding of your topic. If you are writing for more knowledgeable or an internal audience, you can afford to use more complex language and concepts, but you should avoid lengthy sentences or using jargon.

Try to write from a 'whole-of-project' perspective and in the third person, for example, "The project team carried out three trials ...". To portray personal experiences, use first person quotes as supporting evidence for your findings within the document such as "I developed a report...".

1.2 Plain English principles

Be very clear about who the document is for (your target audience) and make sure the size, language, tone and message of the publication are suitable for your audience. Avoid writing a 10-page report if all that's needed is a two-page summary and do not use complex, bureaucratic language unless it is appropriate for your audience. In short:

- explain your message clearly and simply at the start of the document – avoid distracting readers with lengthy introductions
- present your information in a logical way and remember that structure is very important, even for short documents (eg a flyer).

The best way to do this is to:

- Use simple words rather than complex or old fashioned words or phrases, eg:

start rather than **commence**

about rather than **concerning**

before rather than **prior to**

using rather than **utilising**

need rather than **require**

on rather than **upon**

among rather than **amongst**

stop rather than **discontinue**

consider rather than **give consideration to**

- Avoid using two words together that mean the same thing (tautologies), eg:
reason why; new innovation; forward planning; reuse again; personally I; revert back; excess verbosity.
- Show empathy for your audience by avoiding jargon and technical language. Terms such as ‘**professional community**’ and ‘**innovative learning strategies**’ can be frustrating to those who are unfamiliar with the environment and can make your writing difficult to understand.
- Keep your information technically correct without using too many technical terms. Try to use other words to express technical issues simply, without losing important information.
- Remember to spell check and proof-read any documents before you finalise them - this includes emails that are to be sent to clients or colleagues.
- If you have long sentences with many elements, use a list (bullet points) to break up the text and make it easier for the reader to follow what you are saying.
- In most cases, it is recommended that documents are left justified (and ragged right), as in this guide, rather than full justified. The only exception to this rule is newsletters or other documents that use columns, as full justification is sometimes needed to make these documents easier to read.
- Try to use only one idea per paragraph and state this idea in the first sentence of the paragraph to make sure you attract the reader’s attention and get your message across.
- One-sentence paragraphs are useful for emphasising a point, but too many short paragraphs can destroy the impact of your ideas and make the text disjointed. Varying the length of paragraphs makes your document more interesting and readable.
- Don’t indent the first line of a paragraph and remember to leave only one space after any punctuation.

1.3 Discriminatory language

Equal employment opportunity (EEO) and equity initiatives mean that you must not use discriminatory language. Language is discriminatory when it:

- excludes a person or people, or makes them invisible to the reader
- focuses on one characteristic to the exclusion of other more relevant ones
- stereotypes people
- insults or denigrates people
- treats a person or people differently to others.

Discriminatory language can alienate, upset and offend your readers, making it harder to get your message across. Here are some strategies to avoid discriminatory language:

- Use gender-neutral job titles, eg **business manager, business person, firefighter, tradesperson, worker, employee, chairperson**; instead of **businesswoman, fireman** or **workman**.
- Use gender titles carefully; use **Mrs** or **Miss** if you know the woman’s preference, **Ms** in other cases.
- Use plural instead of singular terms:

Instead of: **Every employee should fill out his annual leave form.**

Say: **Every employee should fill out their annual leave form.**

- It is also important to ensure that what you write is culturally appropriate. The key is to be consistent and get clarification or identify a precedent that relates to your situation if necessary.

The most precise and inclusive collective reference for Indigenous Australians preferred by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is: **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**.

Indigenous Australians is acceptable in some instances but consultation with Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal peoples from some parts of Australia indicate that they prefer the distinction as two separate Indigenous groups in Australia.

When referring to people who have come to Australia from non-English speaking countries, **use people from other language backgrounds** or **people from non-English speaking backgrounds**. Never use the abbreviation NESB and be careful how you use the terms migrant, immigrant and ethnic Australian.

Refer to people with disabilities as **people with a disability** or **people who have a physical disability**. Similarly use **hearing impaired** and **visually impaired**. Do not use expressions such as handicapped, the disabled, disabled people, deaf or blind as these are not acceptable.

- Refer to older people as **mature aged people, older people, senior citizens** or **seniors**, not pensioners, old-age pensioners or the aged.
- When referring to people who are too old to be called children but who are not yet adults, refer to them as **young people** rather than juveniles.

1.4 Sentences

It is easier to understand sentences that contain a single message. If you need to refer to other matters or qualify what you are saying, make a second sentence or use en rules (–) or brackets. Avoid using sentences of more than 25–30 words. If you break up long sentences into shorter ones, it will make them clearer and you will need less punctuation. Varying the length of sentences can also add variety and make your document more readable.

It is now quite acceptable to:

- end a sentence with a preposition such as **with, at, for, on, or under**, eg:

This is the audience these products are designed for.

- begin a sentence with a conjunction (eg, **and, or, nor, but**). Just as conjunctions can join clauses within a sentence, they can also join sentences and paragraphs, eg:

And you can always contact the FLAG Secretariat on (03) 9954 2700 or flag-enquiries@natese.gov.au for more information.

- use the plural pronouns **they, their** or **them** in place of the singular **he, she, his, hers, him** or **her** if you don't know the gender or to avoid awkward language, eg:

Every business manager must submit their business activity plan by 31 October.

- use the first and second person pronouns **I, we** or **you** rather than the third person pronouns **he, she** or **they**, eg:

Instead of: **If the business manager is having difficulty submitting their report by the due date, the Secretariat may be able to make alternative arrangements.**

Say: **If you are having difficulty submitting your report by the due date, we may be able to make alternative arrangements.**

Instead of: **Leaders are required to report on their business activities at the end of each year.**

Say: **You must report on your project at the end of each year.**

Active and passive sentences

Use the 'active' voice whenever you can, rather than the 'passive' voice. Active voice makes your writing easier to understand and helps to hold your reader's interest.

Active voice also makes it clear who is doing what to whom.

- A sentence is made up of:

| Agent (who) | Verb (is doing what) | Target (to whom) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|

- A sentence is *passive voice* when the target of the verb appears in front of the verb, eg:

| Target | Verb | Agent |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| The information | will be sent | by the business manager. |

- A sentence is *active voice* when the agent of the action (that is, the person or thing doing something) appears in front of the verb, eg:

| Agent | Verb | Target |
|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| The business manager will send | | the information. |

The active sentence above shows you clearly who is doing the action and is much easier to read.

- Sometimes you can't avoid using the passive voice, eg, when you don't know who the agent is (ie, the person or organisation **doing** the action).

2. Spelling

Correct spelling is essential and even one spelling mistake in a document leaves a very bad impression. It can also change the meaning of some words (such as ‘affect’ versus ‘effect’).

As a general rule, take the first spelling in the dictionary as the preferred spelling, eg **judgment** instead of ‘**judgement**’, or **acknowledgment** instead of ‘**acknowledgement**’,

Use the Microsoft Word (Word) spelling checker if you do not have access to the Australian Oxford dictionary. You can set the Australian language as the default for the dictionary in Word by following this process:

Tools > Language > Set language > English (Australian) > Default

This default will then work for all new documents created using the ‘normal’ template.

For existing documents you are editing or amending, you need to continue to reject the spelling checker’s recommended American spellings for words such as **analyse (analyze)** and **organise (organize)**. However, try to always use the correct spelling for the proper names of international organisations eg World Health Organization.

2.1 Capital letters

Capitals (or upper case letters) disrupt the flow of reading, so use as few as possible. There has been a trend towards minimal capitalisation for some time and this is now reflected in a wide range of government and private sector materials and in the community generally. If in doubt, use a lower case initial letter.

If you are creating a title or heading for a book, fact sheet, article or other publication, use as few capitals as possible. This means only capitalising the first letter of the first word of the title and those words that normally have an initial capital, eg:

A short history of Australian literature

Style manual for authors, editors and printers

Note

- An exception to this rule is the shorter name of the National VET E-learning Strategy, which should be written ‘Strategy’ (capital S)

Use an initial capital:

- for the first word of a sentence
- for the first word of a heading
- at the start of a quotation where the quotation starts at the beginning of a sentence, eg **The boy said: ‘Let me quote from the *Canberra Times*.’**
- for referring to elements of a publication, eg **see Table 1, refer to Chapter 2, attached at Appendix 3**
- for names, eg:
 - names of people, eg **Fred Smith**
 - initials in people’s names, eg **PG Wodehouse**
 - names of nationalities and people, eg **the Irish, American people**
 - formal titles and offices, eg **the Australian Statistician**

Note: Do not capitalise short informal names or titles, eg **the statistician**, **the business manager**. If you are writing about people's roles or occupations in general, do not capitalise these terms, eg **case managers**, **client relations managers**

- civil and military honours and academic degrees, eg **Mary Smith OA**, **James Drake BSc**
- modes of address, eg **Dr Wilson**, **Mrs Rose**, **His Grace the Archbishop**
- place names, names of countries, geological and political designations, eg **Belconnen**, **Australia**, **Jurassic**, **Federated States of Micronesia**
- proper names of certain government programs or services (eg **Business Entry Point**), although the use of capitals in this situation is decreasing
- holidays, ceremonies, days of the week and months of the year, eg **Christmas Day**, **Easter**, **Monday**, **January**
- titles of newspapers and journals, eg ***The Age***, ***the Canberra Times***
- full names of organisations or institutions, eg **the Canberra Institute of Technology**, **the Department of Veterans' Affairs**

Note: If you subsequently use the generic part of an organisation's name, do not use a capital letter, eg **The Department of Veterans' Affairs employs thousands of people. This is likely to change when there are fewer people who need the department's services**

- names of legislation, both the full and shortened forms, eg **the Racial Discrimination Act 1975**, **the Discrimination Act**.

Some nouns used in relation to government should be capitalised to distinguish them from their generic meaning, eg:

- **the Constitution (noun and adjective)**
- **the Crown.**

Other words that should always be capitalised include:

- **Aboriginal**
- **Indigenous.**

Other words can be capitalised or in lower case, depending on how they're used, eg:

- **federal** should be upper case if it forms part of an official title eg **the Federal Court of Australia** or lower case if it is a broad descriptive term, eg **a federal government initiative**
- **government** should be capitalised as part of a formal title or abbreviated specific title, but use lower case elsewhere, eg **the Victorian Government** (but then refer to **the government** in lower case from then on), **a government pension**, **local governments**, **federal government initiatives**, **Commonwealth government programs**
- **parliament** – as for 'Government' – capitalise only in formal titles, eg **the debate in parliament continued for hours**, **the Commonwealth Parliament**, **Parliament House**.

2.2 Lower case

Following the trend to minimal capitalisation, use lower case:

- for words in headings, other than the first word and actual names, follow the style used for the headings in this guide
- for titles of publications (including forms), other than the first word and actual names
- to begin elements of a list (dot points) that are not full sentences, eg:

Other new areas are:

- distance learning
- online delivery of education programs.

2.3 Italics

Use italics:

- for titles of publications, eg **You will find further information in the *Guide to online learning***
- for full titles of legislation (that is, titles including the date), eg **The Tax Office is authorised by the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* to ask for information**
- for foreign words and phrases that have not been anglicised, eg ***in toto, in testimonium***

Note: Any foreign words not listed in the Australian Oxford Dictionary will need to be italicised

- for names of newspapers and journals, eg the ***Canberra Times***, the ***Australian Financial Review***, ***Australian Health Review***.

3. Punctuation

3.1 Spacing

Many of us were taught to always put a double space after a full-stop or a colon. That is no longer the style; when writing any document today, you should insert only a single space after a full-stop, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark or any other punctuation. The only time you should key in more than a single space is when you want more space for visual effect or for layout purposes.

To create a non-breaking space where you don't want words or numbers separated, eg, a date such as 4 July 2006, press control + shift + space bar instead of just the space bar. If you click on your 'Show/Hide' icon on your toolbar, you should notice a small circle between each number or word to indicate that you have inserted a non-breaking space there.

3.2 Full-stops

Use full-stops:

- after the final element in a list, eg:
Make sure you bring your:
 - passport
 - plane ticket
 - visa.
- at the end of an abbreviation consisting of lower case letters only, or an initial capital and lower case letters (eg **Wed.**, **ref.**, **no.**, **vol.**) but not at the end of a contraction (eg **Pty**, **Ltd**, **Dr**)
- as a decimal point, eg **37.5**
- to mark the end of a sentence, eg **He has finally completed his report.**

Do not use full-stops:

- at the end of headings
- within or after abbreviations or acronyms consisting of capital letters only, or after contractions, eg **GST**, **Mrs**, **dept**, **Cwlth**
- with short, common abbreviations, such as **am**, **pm**, **eg**, **ie**, **etc**
- after initials in people's names, eg **PK Smith**
- between letters in civil and military honours and academic degrees, eg **Peter Smith BA**, **not Peter Smith B.A.**

3.3 Ellipsis points

Ellipsis points, or suspension points, consist of three full-stops and are primarily used to show where words are omitted from quoted material, eg:

The man said: 'The new system will simplify current arrangements ... and improve understanding.'

If you use ellipsis points at the end of a sentence, you don't need to add another full-stop.

3.4 Exclamation marks

As a general rule, exclamation marks are used for dramatic effect in fictional or non-official writing and should only be used minimally when writing for external audiences.

In internal documents, writers may want to use an exclamation mark for effect, especially in headings (eg **Business managers go bald in charity effort!**).

3.5 Question marks

Use a question mark at the end of a sentence that asks a direct question (eg **What is my new schedule?**).

This includes headings in which a question has been posed (eg **in a fact sheet**).

Do not use a question mark at the end of an indirect question (eg **He asked me if I had lodged my tax return.**).

3.6 Commas

Commas help to make the meaning of a sentence clearer and easier to read.

Use commas:

- to make the reader pause at the right place, eg:
Once you have entered all the details, complete the declaration.
- to avoid ambiguity, eg:
Michael said Lily was sick. (Michael said of Lily)
Michael, said Lily, was sick. (Lily said of Michael)
- between a series of words or phrases in a running list, eg:
Your income includes money from employment, business, rent, interest and dividends.
- optionally after 'eg' and 'that is', eg:
... eg, a passport, drivers licence and citizenship certificate are all satisfactory forms of identification.
- to mark off a non-defining clause, eg:
You will use this new form, which is called a tax file number declaration, to quote your tax file number to your employer.
Note: You could use brackets in place of the commas in the above situation.
- to separate groups of three figures, eg: **\$6,893, \$68,935 and \$689,354**; if you are writing for a scientific or international audience, use a non-breaking space instead of a comma.

Do not use commas:

- in dates, eg:
23 July 2006 (use non-breaking spaces instead)
- in addresses, where elements of the address are on separate lines, eg:
**Project Manager
GPO Box 1234
Sydney NSW 1000**

- in front of the words and, but, for, or, nor where the sentence is short and unambiguous, eg:

You might not have realised it but today is 31 October.

- between a subject and its verb, even if the subject is long, eg:

Pensioners whose aids require battery types not normally in stock will have to buy their batteries from commercial outlets. [don't insert a comma after 'stock']

3.7 Semicolons and colons

Use semicolons (;):

- to separate parallel clauses, eg:

To be poor and not complain is difficult; to be rich and not complain is easy.

- to separate clauses or phrases that already contain commas, eg:

In 2004 there were 120 complaints; in 2005, 103; and in 2006, only 71.

- to separate items in a list that runs on, where commas are already used, eg:

With his application he sent his passport, birth certificate and drivers licence; his other proof of identity documents; and a \$100 note.

- before clauses introduced by such words as 'however', 'nevertheless' and 'therefore', eg:

He is a wealthy man; nevertheless he pays very little tax.

However, it is often preferable to start a new sentence where you would have inserted a semicolon, or to turn the sentence around and start with 'Although', eg:

Although he is a wealthy man, he pays very little tax.

Use colons (:):

- before a direct quote, eg:

The man said: 'Anyone in line should get on the bus now.'

- to introduce a list broken up by semicolons, eg:

If we don't take action, there could be serious consequences: increased costs; low morale; and loss of faith among the public.

- to introduce a list of bullet points or dot points, eg:

Please provide the following details:

- **name**
- **address**
- **date of birth.**

- to separate a title from the subtitle (in place of an en rule or em rule) when both are written on the one line (eg: **HECS: your questions answered**)

- to indicate a ratio (eg: **1:100,000**).

Note: There is no space before or after a colon used to indicate a ratio.

3.8 Hyphens, en rules and em rules

A 'dash' can be a hyphen (-), an en rule (–) or an em rule (—). They are used in different situations.

Hyphens (-)

A hyphen is used to join two or more words or expressions to make a compound expression (eg: **value-added**).

Use hyphens:

- to join a prefix to a word that starts with the same letter as the last letter of the prefix (eg: **pre-eminent, anti-intellectual**) with the exception of words like cooperate, coordinate and email which have become common usage
- to make a compound word consisting of a prefix and a capitalised word (eg: **un-Australian, anti-American, non-English speaking background**)
- to avoid ambiguity in a prefixed compound (eg: to show the difference between **re-cover** (cover again) and **recover** (regain) or **re-sign** (sign again) and **resign** (give up membership)
- to express fractions (eg: **one-third, three-quarters**)
- when using 'pre' or 'post' plus a date (eg: **re-2000, post-June 2005**)
- to break a word at the end of a line where this is unavoidable in a typeset document
- to make a compound adjective (eg: **one-off tax-free payment, face-to-face discussions**).

Note: if you are not sure whether a compound is one word, hyphenated or two words, check the Australian Oxford dictionary. Try not to use too many hyphenated compounds, as these can be difficult for readers.

If you want to avoid the situation where a hyphen appears at the end of the line, select 'non-breaking hyphen' by following this process:

Insert > Symbol > Special characters > non-breaking hyphen > dash > Shortcut key > choose your own shortcut (eg, Alt + h) > Assign > Close.

From then on, when you press Alt + h you will obtain a non-breaking hyphen.

En rules

An en rule is twice as long as a hyphen. Use it to link words, to qualify things, to join some types of compound adjectives and to show spans of figures, time and distance.

Use en rules:

- to link words or numbers in pairs, eg: **pages 400–1, May–July, 2000–01, 2002–03** but **1999–2000** for a change of century
Note: Avoid using forward slashes as in **2005/06, June/July**
- to show an association between two words that retain their separate identity, eg: **federal–state agreement, hand–eye coordination**
- as a minus sign, with a space either side, eg: **\$400 – \$32 = \$368**
- in a sub-list of bullet points, with a space between the en rule and the text.

Use a spaced en rule in some situations where you may once have used an em rule, including:

- for sub-headings, eg: **The new learning environment – what's in it for you?**

- to replace a colon or semicolon, eg: **There are two main forms of accounting – cash and accrual.**
- to replace a comma, when a slightly longer pause is needed, eg: **There are times when we will need to send clients a terse follow-up letter – especially if they have a history of non-compliance.**

Avoid using en rules with the words ‘from’ or ‘between’, eg: **‘this is valid for the period between 2005 and 2006** not ‘...the period between 1970–1998...’ or **this shirt is available in all sizes from 8 to 16** not ‘...available in all sizes from 8–16...’

3.9 *Em rules*

An em rule is a long dash, twice the length of an en rule.

Many people find em rules difficult on the eye and rather cumbersome, with the result that they are being used less and less. However, some writers and editors still prefer em rules to signify an abrupt change, to introduce an amplification or explanation or to set apart parenthetical elements. An em rule does not have a space on either side, eg:

You must provide three forms of identity—your birth certificate, driver’s licence and passport—and all must be put in the same envelope.

HECS—your questions answered.

3.10 *Brackets*

Brackets should be used sparingly as they can interfere with the flow of the text. Use brackets:

- to enclose text you could leave out without losing the basic meaning, eg: **Bob Hawke (the former prime minister) opened the new building.**
- to enclose letters or numbers either at the beginning of a paragraph or subparagraph or within text, eg: **(a), (f), (iii), (iv)**
- to enclose an abbreviation or acronym at its first reference; that is, spell out the full term and follow it with the abbreviation or acronym within brackets, eg: **Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG).**

A complete sentence within brackets has its closing punctuation mark within the brackets, eg: **They are two of a kind. (They ought to be – they are identical twins.)**

Try to only use square brackets when you need to enclose one set of brackets within another set or add words of explanation, eg: **(This information is taken from the report on education [dated August 1999] explaining the major changes to the sector.)**

3.11 *Apostrophes*

Use apostrophes:

- to show that letters have been omitted in most contractions, eg:

don’t = do not

we’re = we are

I’ve = I have

I’ll = I will

There are some exceptions eg **govt, Cwlth, dept**

- to indicate possession, eg: **the CEO’s announcement, Robert Menzies’ memoirs, James’ report**

If you are not sure where the apostrophe should go, ask yourself, 'Who owns the [noun]?', then put an **'s** after the answer to the question.

For plural nouns ending in **s**, put an apostrophe only after the **s**, eg: **the governments' budget**.

To distinguish between **its** and **it's**:

It's is a contraction of 'it is', eg: **It's a difficult form to complete**.

Its is a possessive pronoun, eg: **The department discussed its new website**.

Do not use apostrophes:

- with possessive pronouns, eg:
hers (belonging to her)
its (belonging to it)
theirs (belonging to them)
yours (belonging to you)
whose (belonging to whom)
your (belonging to you)
their (belonging to them)
- when the expression is more adjectival than possessive, eg: **senior citizens club, drivers licence, personal investors guide**
- when referring to shortened forms that are plural, eg: **1990s, in the 60s, CDs at half price**

When using apostrophes be careful of these terms:

it's = it is but **its** = belonging to it

who's = who is but **whose** = belonging to whom

you're = you are but **your** = belonging to you

they're = they are but **their** = belonging to them and **there** = in or at a particular place.

3.12 Quotation marks

Quotation marks are also called quote marks or speech marks. They are used to enclose quoted words that have been spoken or written by somebody. If you quote the work of another writer, ensure you do so exactly.

Try to follow the examples below:

- enclose direct speech in double quotation marks, and always capitalise the first word, eg:
"Yes, that is the situation," the manager replied.
"It is complex," he wrote, "because it addresses the issues of both lecturers and students."
- use double quotation marks in the first instance and only use single quotation marks for a quote within a quote, eg:
The man stated: "Let me quote from this book, 'We encourage you to send your report as early as possible'."
- use single quotation marks to enclose a direct quote, whether it is a sentence fragment, or a whole sentence, eg:
The committee expressed 'grave concern' at the 'discriminatory approach to law enforcement'.
Have you read the magazine article 'Shave for a cure'?

- quote the work of another writer exactly, and if you need to add any words of explanation, do so in square brackets, eg:

The manager said: “Although I will be lenient [regarding the use of the staff room], I expect employees to do the right thing.”

- you should also use quotation marks when referring to the title of an unpublished document, a chapter in a published work, an article in a periodical, an essay or a lecture, eg:

If you have employees, you should read the chapter entitled ‘Rules for conduct in the workplace’.

He delivered his lecture, ‘Making education work for Australia’, clearly and persuasively.

- do not use quotation marks with indirect or reported speech, eg:

They said it would be too difficult to implement.

- do not use quotation marks to enclose familiar expressions, eg:

All the new rules introduced during the year have now become business as usual.

- however, you could use quotation marks (or italics or bold) to indicate technical terms or nicknames, colloquial terms, ironic emphasis or words that have been coined.

Placement of the end punctuation mark

Place the terminating punctuation mark (that is, the last full-stop or other punctuation) inside the closing quotation mark if there is no carrier (or explanatory) expression, eg:

“It’s great fun. I love being an advocate.”

However, if there is a carrier (or explanatory) expression, place the terminating punctuation mark outside the closing quotation mark, eg:

She smiled and said: “It’s great fun. I love being an advocate”.

Quoting more than one sentence

If your quote is more than about 30 words long, you should indent it about 5–10mm from the left margin and set it in smaller type (but not in italics). This is called a *block quotation* and, because it is differentiated from the text in this way, it does not need quotation marks, eg:

The manager wrote in the Guide:

If you use the Guide properly and make an honest mistake, my staff will not charge you a penalty, although we may ask you to pay interest on any missing money.

3.13 Bulleted lists

Bulleted lists, or dot points, are a convenient, space-saving way to break up complicated passages into accessible parts and to group similar elements.

Following an (preferably short) introductory sentence, you will normally start each list element with a bullet point. However, in some cases (such as where you are trying to list things in order of importance or priority) you may want to have an ordered list and these usually start with a number, a lower case letter or a Roman numeral. A full-stop is used at the end of the last element.

Capitalisation for bullet points follows the same rules as for normal sentences, so if you have a short lead-in phrase followed by a colon and a list of related elements, these will all be in lower case, eg:

Please provide the following details:

- **name**
- **address**
- **date of birth.**

There are times when you will introduce a bulleted list with a full lead-in sentence ending with a full-stop, especially if each element in the list is going to be long. In this case, use a full sentence for each element in the list, starting each one with a capital letter and ending each one with a full-stop, eg:

As a student, you have a number of obligations.

- **You must register for your course and make sure you attend classes.**
- **You must complete your assignments on time.**
- **You must speak to your lecturer or tutor if you are experiencing difficulties.**

Lists become difficult when they contain different elements, such as a mixture of single words and phrases, clauses or sentences. Sometimes you can solve the problem with a little rewriting or you may be able to reorder the elements and put in some extra punctuation to make the list work better.

Take care never to introduce a bulleted list with the beginning of a sentence that is then completed after your bulleted list. This makes for an extremely long sentence, which is very hard on the reader and is also very poor grammar. Try to turn the sentence around so that you have the important text and meaning leading into the bulleted list.

Make sure each bulleted point makes sense if you read it straight after your lead-in phrase. If you have a verb at the beginning of your first bulleted point, you will need a verb at the beginning of all the others too.

3.14 Shortened word forms

Shortened word forms include abbreviations, acronyms and contractions. Always keep in mind your audience's likely level of understanding and aim for simplicity.

Try to avoid using abbreviations or acronyms – especially if you are writing for the web.

The National VET E-learning Strategy is to be used in full in all outputs. At no time are the acronyms NVELS or VELS to be used in any Strategy output.

3.14.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of a word or words. Follow these rules with abbreviations:

- Try to minimise their use. People outside your organisation might not be comfortable or familiar with abbreviations that are second nature to you. Abbreviations can interrupt the flow of reading, as well as the reader's understanding of your message.
- If you have to use an abbreviation, or you are sure the abbreviation will be familiar to your reader, make sure you spell it out in full the first time you use it and put it in brackets immediately afterwards, eg: **The National VET E-learning Strategy (Strategy)**...
- Because web users do not necessarily follow text in the same sequence as readers of paper products, it is better to spell out abbreviations at every reference in web documents, or use part of the name at second and subsequent references, eg: **the Administrative Appeals Tribunal** can become **the tribunal** rather than **AAT**.
- Do not put full stops in abbreviations that are in upper case, eg: **AAT**, or some lower case abbreviations, eg: **am**, **pm**, **eg**, **ie** or **etc** (see below).

- Put full-stops in lower case abbreviations such as **no.** (number) and **vol.** (volume) but not in their plural forms (**nos** and **vols**).
- It is now acceptable to write **eg** for **example**, **ie** for **that is** and **etc** for **et cetera**. There is no need for full-stops to be placed between the letters.
- Use the following abbreviations for states and territories in Australia:

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| – Australian Capital Territory (ACT) | – South Australia (SA) |
| – New South Wales (NSW) | – Tasmania (TAS) |
| – Northern Territory (NT) | – Victoria (VIC) |
| – Queensland (QLD) | – Western Australia (WA). |

3.14.2 Acronyms

Acronyms are shortened forms pronounced as words. As with abbreviations, do not use full stops in acronyms. Acronyms may be formed:

- from the initial letters of other words
- from a number of letters in the phrase being shortened (as in radar – radio detection and ranging).

When acronyms are well established, they are usually written with an initial capital only, eg: **Comalco**, **Qantas**.

The National VET E-learning Strategy is to be used in full in all outputs. At no time are the acronyms *NVELS* or *VELS* to be used in any Strategy output.

3.14.3 Contractions

Contractions are shortened forms of a word or words that consist of at least the first and last letter of the word, eg: **Mr**, **Rd**, **Cwlth**. There is no need to use full stops with these contractions.

Grammatical contractions – where two words are telescoped into one – are more common in speech than in written communications, eg: you are more likely to say, **I won't be there** than **I will not be there**.

You are less likely to use these contractions in formal written materials such as a fact sheet, guide or booklet. However, in less formal documents, such as newsletters or articles, you may adopt a less formal tone and use contractions such as **don't** (instead of **do not**) or **shouldn't** (instead of **should not**). You need to insert an apostrophe to show where letters have been omitted, eg: **won't**, **didn't**, **can't**.

The ampersand (&) should be avoided in normal text but may be used where there are space restrictions, eg: in **corporate and company names**, and in **tables and figures**.

4. Numbers

4.1 In text

In descriptive or narrative documents where numbers are used infrequently, it can be easier on the reader if you spell all numbers out in words. As a general rule, you should show:

- single digit numbers in words (that is, numbers one to nine)
- numbers 10 and greater in figures (eg, 10, 11, 345)
- when talking about millions of dollars, use the \$ symbol, a non-breaking space and the digit, eg: **\$2 million, \$10.5 million.**

Try to avoid using a number at the beginning of a sentence but, if you have to, you must write it out in full. The following example demonstrates the different use of numbers:

The department surveyed **35** students about the course. **Nineteen** expressed a clear understanding, **11** claimed an improved understanding and **four** responded that they did not understand the course. Only **one** failed to respond to the survey.

Mistakes cost the department \$1 million each year.

You should also note the following rules:

- Use a comma between every group of three digits except for phone numbers which usually have a space between four for landlines and four for the first set and three for each subsequent set in mobile numbers:

Numbers: \$12,100 or \$1,678,870

- Phone numbers should be written as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| National phone numbers | (02) 9123 4567 |
| International phone numbers | +61 2 9123 4567 |
| Digital mobile numbers | 0402 123 456 |
| 13 numbers | 13 24 56 |
| 1800 numbers | 1800 123 456 |
| Internal extension numbers | x62123 |

- Right-align columns of numbers, eg:

8,123,780

5,400

12,100

- If you are working in a table or spreadsheet, different rules may have to apply in order to suit the computer software you are using or the design of the overall document. Commas may also create problems so you may have to be flexible.
- Use hyphens in fractions and in larger numbers, eg: **three-quarters, twenty-eight.**
- Use a hyphen to connect numbers with words, eg: **24-hour turnaround, three-day conference.**

4.2 Tables

A table is a systematic arrangement of data (usually figures) in columns and rows. Font should be 10 point unless it is in an appendix, where it can be a minimum of 8 point, depending on the length of the table. If possible, make tables portrait (vertical) rather than landscape (horizontal), especially if they are to appear on the web.

Tables should be presented clearly and consistently throughout, numbered in order from the beginning of the document. They should be complete and freestanding; do not repeat in the text what is already clearly shown in the accompanying table. Table and column headings should be short and descriptive, with minimal capitalisation. If a table fits over two pages, header rows must be repeated.

eg: **Table 1: Milestones and timelines**

| Action | Due date |
|---|--|
| Funding opportunities advertised | 17 October 2011 |
| Applications for Regional Businesses Programs submitted to Business Manager | 5.00pm AEDT Thursday 10 November 2011 |
| Selection process | 8-25 November 2011 |
| Selection process finalised | 25 November 2011 |

See the References section for an example of the header row being repeated.

4.3 Dates

Use the form day | month | year without commas, eg: 30 June 2006. If part of the date is likely to wrap automatically onto the next line, insert a non-breaking space between the number and the month.

If you need to express a date in numbers only, separate the day, month and year (in that order) by a forward slash, eg: **30/6/2006**. Use an en rule to link spans of numbers in dates, eg: **22–24 March, 2002–2003**. Do not use 2002/2003.

4.4 Time

For time, use the 12-hour system and the abbreviations **am** and **pm** with no spaces or full-stops, eg: **8.00am AEDT**, **10.45pm AEDT** to account for time differences between states and territories.

4.5 Percentages

Use the symbol (%) in statistical publications and numerical tables, rather than the word **percent**. You can also use the symbol rather than the word in more narrative text if it is going to be easier on the reader, eg:

Instead of: **The TAFE enjoyed a 75 percent response rate to its survey.**

Write: **The TAFE enjoyed a 75% response rate to its survey.**

Try to avoid using a percentage figure at the beginning of a sentence. However, if you cannot avoid this, you must spell the figure out in full, followed by the words **percent**, eg:

Seventy-five percent of survey recipients responded to the survey.

4.6 Page numbers

When referring to page numbers, use the fewest possible digits and separate numbers with an en rule, eg: **pages 57–9**, **pages 79–98**, **pages 96–109**.

To avoid confusion, for numbers between 10 and 19 in each hundred, you may need to use more digits, eg: **pages 10–11** (not 10–1), **pages 215–17** (not 215–7).

5. References

All references used in the main body of a document need to be included in the reference list and placed in a footnote. The list is arranged in alphabetical order by author's surname. Books, journals and online media are all included in the same list. The **reference list** is placed at the end of the document before any appendices.

| Type of source | Format for in-text citation | Format for reference list |
|---|---|---|
| Book (one author) | <i>Author, date</i> (Lave 1988) | <i>Author, date, title (in italics), place of publication, publisher</i> Lave, J. (1988) <i>Cognition in Practice</i> , Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. |
| Book (one or more authors) | <i>Name of first listed author, date</i> (Purdie at al. 1999) | Purdie, N. and D. Smith. (1999) <i>Case studies in teaching and learning: Australian perspectives</i> , Sydney, Prentice Hall. |
| Multiple books by same author | <i>Author then mark each book with an 'a', 'b', 'c' etc. after the date</i> (Glasson 1996a) | Glasson, P. (1996) <i>Eyesight and the brain</i> , Melbourne, Oxford University Press. |
| Chapter in edited book | <i>Chapter author, date</i> (Schlegoff 1972) | <i>Author, date, chapter title 'in' main author, title (in italics), page numbers, place of publication, publisher</i> Schlegoff, E. (1972) Notes on a conversational practice: Formulating place. In D. Sudnow (Ed.) <i>Studies in Social Interaction</i> , pp 75-119, New York, Free Press. |
| Journal | <i>Author, date</i> (Somekh 1991) | <i>Author, date, title of article, title of journal (in italics), part number, page numbers (beginning of article - end of article)</i> Somekh, B. and Davies, R. (1991) 'Towards a pedagogy for information technology', <i>The Curriculum Journal</i> , Vol 2, No 1, pp 153-70. |
| Web page | <i>Author, date</i> (Pearson 1999) | <i>Author, date, title (in italics), web page, date accessed</i> Pearson, M. (1999) <i>Online study skills guide</i> , http://www.hud.ac.uk/schools/skills/referen.htm , accessed 16/9/99. <i>NB: if you can't find a date put (date unknown), if you can't find the author put the organisation (eg BBC)</i> |
| Streaming video (eg YouTube) | <i>Creator or performer, communication tool, date</i> (John F. Kennedy speech 2006) | <i>Creator or performer, communication tool, date, file type, web address, date accessed</i> John F. Kennedy speech (2006) Streaming video recording. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kza-iTe2100 (accessed 15/01/2008). |
| Streaming audio (eg podcasts) | <i>Creator or performer in main text, then title, date</i> Professor Geoff Hammond's lecture discusses.... (Lowering our carbon footprint 2007) | <i>Title, date, file type, url, date accessed</i> Lowering our carbon footprint (2007) Streaming sound recording: MP3. http://www.bath.ac.uk/lmf/download/033-podbath-Geoff_Hammon/17465.mp3 , accessed 7/05/08. |
| Message posted to an online group or discussion forum | <i>Include enough description to identify the individual post in the discussion thread, in your own words.</i> Frosty, a regular contributor to discussions on permaculture, made a comment regarding the use of goats in lantana control, in his post on 14 January, 6:21pm. (PHPBB permaculture discussion forum 2009) | <i>Title of forum and thread, not the poster's username. Include information to identify the individual posts in your text.</i> PHPBB permaculture discussion forum. <i>Planting, growing, nurturing: Removing lantana</i> (2009) http://forums.permaculture.org.au/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=9790&sid=91accbd1047600460fc5283fc49d83c1 , accessed 21/01/09. |

6. For more information

The FLAG Secretariat is available to assist in interpreting and applying the requirements set out in the *Communications handbook* and associated user guides.

Telephone: 03 9954 2700

Email: flag_enquiries@natese.gov.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au